(b) and (c) Operation of flights between India and Gulf are considered during bilateral civil aviation discussions with the concerned Gulf countries. Airlines of the following Gulf countries are presently having traffic rights to operate to Southern States:-

Bahrain (Trivandrum, Chennai, Bangalore, Cochin)

Oman (Trivandrum, Chennai, Cochin)

Qatar (Trivandrum, Hyderabad, Chennai, Cochin)

Saudi Arabia (Chennai, Cochin, Hyderabad)

UAE (Chennai, Hyderabad, Cochin)

Kuwait (Trivandrum, Chennai, Cochin)

In addition, Air India and Indian airlines are also operating to various destinations in Gulf from Hyderabad, Bangalore, Chennai, Cochin, Trivandrum and Calicut.

Purchase of Aircrafts by AI

1407. SHRI S.M. LAL JAN BASHA: Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Boeing company has offered 50 aircrafts to Air India;

(b) whether it is also a fact that Air India has sought such an offer of 50 long-range and medium-range passenger aircrafts;

(c) what would be the phased acquisition programme of Air India for such aircraft;

(d) whether there is a traffic for Air India for such large scale purchase of aircrafts; and

(e) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI PRAFUL PATEL): (a) and (b) In response to a tender notice for 50 aircraft, Air India has received the technical and financial bids from M/s. Airbus Industries and M/s. Boeing for the aircraft.

(c) Subject to completion of all procedural formalities prescribed for public investment, Air India has planned a delivery schedule for all aircraft starting from Winter 2006/07 upto 2012/13, the year in which Air India would get deliveries of all the 50 aircraft.

(d) and (e) International air traffic to/from India has been increasing over the years but air India has not been able to fully utilize its traffic rights due to its small and ageing fleet. This has resulted in loss of market share for Air India. Increased competition and declining yields have put pressure on air India's profitability. These new aircraft would replace some of the older aircraft in the fleet apart from increasing the fleet strength. Acquisition of new aircraft is expected to take care of Air India's requirements in terms of growth and reach and increase its market share.

Direct Air Service between Kathmandu and Bagdogra

1408. SHRI PRASANTA CHATTERJEE. Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of the public demand for direct flights between Kathmandu and Bagdogra; and

(b) if so, the details of action taken so far to fulfil the demand?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI PRAFUL PATEL): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Due to operational constraints at Bagdogra airport as well as existing aircraft resource constraints, Indian Airlines is unable to consider introduction of flights between Bagdogra and Kathmandu at present.

International Air Connectivity at Regional Airports

1409. SHRI RAJEEV SHUKLA: Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government are taking steps to improve international air connectivity at regional airports outside the metros; and

(b) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINSITRY OF CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI PRAFUL PATEL): (a) and (b) Air India and Indian Airlines are operating international services from the following airports besides the 4 metro cities of Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai and Kolkata:—

Ahmedabad, Goa, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Kochi, Kozhikode, Thiruvananthapuram, Amritsar, Lucknow, Coimbatore, Gaya, Guwahati, Jaipur, Trichy and Varanasi.

As part of the ASEAN offer, designated airlines of all ASEAN countries have been permitted to operate unlimited number of services to 18 non-